Consumer Health Information in Allegheny County Pittsburgh, PA

An Environmental Scan

Project Conducted at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs

for the Jewish Healthcare Foundation

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April 17, 2001

Jewish Healthcare Foundation

- Created by hospital sale
- Public charity
- Funds used in Southwestern PA to advance health
- Focus on systems change rather than program funding

Problem?

- Significant potential impact on health of information technologies
- Lack of information on extent of use

Research Approach: Environmental Scan

- Advisory Panel
  - Co-Chairs: Donald A.B. Lindberg, MD and Charles P. Friedman, PhD
  - 18-Member Advisory Panel

- Funding Recipient: University of Pittsburgh, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs

Project Goals

- **To identify consumer information-seeking patterns, preferences and barriers**
- **To describe the health information technologies currently used by consumers in Allegheny County**
- **To make recommendations for improving consumer access to health information resources**

Research Questions

- What precipitates a consumer's search for health information?
- Where do consumers prefer to seek health information?
- Where do consumers actually seek health information?
- How do consumers evaluate sources of health information?
- What role do information technologies currently play in providing consumers with health information?

Data Sources

- Pre-survey focus groups
- Telephone Survey
- Meetings with Disease-Specific Support Groups
- Library Patron Survey

Focus Groups of Healthcare Consumers

- 41 Men and Women in four groups:
  - Managing major health problem in last six months
  - Managing no major health problem in last six months

Consumer Health Information Seeking

Contacting a Health Care Provider (HCP)

Looking Elsewhere for Information

Contacting an Insurance Company

Definitions

Consumers : Caregivers as well as care receivers

Health care provider : “A doctor, a nurse practitioner, a physician assistant, a mental health therapist or anyone else seen for health care.”

Telephone Survey

- 1000 Allegheny County Adults
- Randomly-dialed telephone numbers
- 54 questions (maximum)
- Under 10 minutes

Follow-up Methods

- Support Group Meetings
  - Arthritis, diabetes, stroke, mental illness
  - Via Surveys: breast cancer, cardiac care, AIDS
- Public Library Patron Survey
  - Four branch locations
  - Telephone reference unit

Finding: New Healthcare Consumer

- **Traditional Information Seekers**
  - **Rely only on a HCP for information**
  - **48.1% of the sample**
- **New Information Seekers**
  - **Rely on both a HCP and additional sources of information**
  - **26.4% of the sample**

Finding: After HCP, Internet most widely used source

Sources Consulted	Percent of sources consulted
Internet	51.1%
Print Material, not from library	24.2%
Print Material, from library	17.8%
Friends, family members, colleagues	11.7%
Other HCPs	8.3%
Community organizations, hospitals, clinics	5.3%
Television	1.5%
Pharmacist	1.5%
Support Group	0.8%
Other	0.8%
Total Number	264

Finding: Mixed Evaluations of HCPs

	TRADITIONAL HCP Only No Health Problem (1)	TRADITIONAL HCP Only Health Problem (2)	SEEKER HCP + Info No Health Problem (3)	SEEKER HCP + Info Health Problem (4)
Listened Carefully?				
Always	**71.0%** (3/95)	**74.8%** (3/95;4/90)	**57.0%**	**63.4%**
Explained so Understood?				
Always	**74.6%** (3-4/95)	**71.3%**	**64.9%**	**62.5%**
Answered Questions to Satisfaction?				
Always	**70.8%** (3-4/95)	**70.4%** (3-4/95)	**55.6%**	**56.2%**
Total Number	**366**	**115**	**151**	**112**

Finding: Limited Utility of Other Sources of non-HCP Information

	Percent Finding Source "Very Helpful"	Total Consulting Each Source
Friends and family	32.3%	31
Internet	29.6%	135
Print material, not library	21.9%	64
Print material, library	10.6%	47

Finding: HCP/Consumer "Disconnect"

"Trustworthiness" of Internet Health Information	
5 Very Trustworthy	33.0%
4	31.0%
3	22.5%
2	10.5%
1 Not Trustworthy at All	2.9%
Percent Finding the Following Kinds of Sites as "Very or Somewhat Trustworthy (5, 4)"	
A site recommended by HCP	76.4%
A public library site	72.0%
A university site	71.0%
A hospital site	66.7%
A non profit organization site	59.6%
A government site	47.6%
A pharmaceutical company site	42.4%
Total Number	318

Information Distributed by HCPs

Kind of Information	Percent of Those Who Contacted a Health Care Provider
Distributed pamphlet(s) or other written information	56.2%
Used a Video	4.6%
Used a Computer Program	5.5%
Referred to Educational Class	8.2%
Referred to Support Group	8.7%
Referred to Web Site	3.1%
Total Number Contacting a HCP	747

Bringing Internet Information to HCPs

	Percent with Access to Internet
Discussed Information Found on the Internet with Healthcare Provider	43.4%
Total with Access to Internet	318
How Receptive was Health Care Provider?	
Very Receptive	58.0%
Somewhat Receptive	37.7%
Not Receptive At All	4.3%
Total who Discussed Internet Information with HCP	138

Finding: Internet Use Limited to Information Seeking

	Percent of Respondents with Internet Access
Ever Sent e-mail to a Health Care Provider	5.7%
Ever Joined an Online Support Group, Chat Room or News Group for a Health Problem	3.7%
Ever Ordered Medications Through the Internet	2.4%
Ever Ordered Other Health Products Through the Internet	3.3%

Finding: Key Role of Public Libraries in Providing Internet Acce

	Percent Who Access Internet via Public Libraries
Overall Distribution	8.1%
Income	
Less than $25,000	17.2%
More than $25,000	3.6% - 5.0%
Education	
Less Than High School	28.6%
High school and Up	3.5% - 10.7%
Age	
65 and Older	21.9%
Under 65	2.2% - 11.6%

Summary of Major Findings

- Emergence of a New Healthcare Consumer
- HCP-Consumer Communication Challenges
  - Critical, on-going role played by HCPs
  - Chronic illness and dissatisfaction with HCP
  - “Disconnect” between HCPs and Consumers

Summary of Major Findings, cont.

- Questionable Value of Information Resources
- Beyond Internet, Limited Use of Health Information Technologies by Consumers or HCPs
- Critical Role of Public Library in Providing Internet Access

Future Funding Priorities: Addressing Consumer Information Challenges

- Seeking ways to improve HCP-Consumer communication
  - Finding ways to increase use of health information tools by HCPs and Consumers
  - Evaluating special information needs of consumers with chronic illness
  - Identifying barriers to better communication from perspective of HCP
- Improving access to quality health information
  - Exploring roles of information “gatekeepers”
  - Enhancing role of public libraries